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ABSTRACT

The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) was used to assess the level and intensity of burnout in 165 California State University at Long Beach college seniors preparing for the human services professions, specifically teaching, nursing, criminal justice, and social welfare. A comparison group of 80 engineering seniors was also assessed. The 40-item questionnaire contained a modified version of the MBI a seven-item college-oriented burnout questionnaire, and demographic items. Frequency and intensity scores were derived for three subscales: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. The following results were noted: (1) Burnout is a valid construct for college students, although it exists to a lesser extent than it does in the working professional. (2) Human services college seniors experience burnout similar to their professional counterparts on the emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment subscales of the MBI. (3) Depersonalization is not a factor for college seniors. (4) Burnout occurs equally in engineering and human services students. (5) Human services majors are more altruistic and people-oriented than seniors with other majors. (6) High burnout predicts negative attitudes toward school, perception of less value in accomplishments, and less dedication to school. It does not predict lower levels of participation with others in school. This study represents the first application of the modified form of the MBI for college seniors. Further studies need to be completed before generalizations can be made to a larger population. (GDC)

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BURNOUT IN COLLEGE SENIORS

PREPARING FOR THE HUMAN SERVICES PROFESSIONS

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The purpose of my study was to assess the level of burnout in college seniors who were preparing for the human services professions, specifically students majoring in teaching, nursing, criminal justice, and social welfare at California State University, Long Beach. Additionally, the study compared the human services group with students majoring in engineering. This study was the first to extend and evaluate the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981) with this population.

Burnout is a research concept that has developed during the past ten years. Initially, Freudenberger (1974) introduced burnout as a "common phenomenon" among staff workers in the human services professions. At about this same time, Maslach (1973) reported on a similar phenomenon called "detached concern" in the health and social service professions. Working from these initial findings, Freudenberger, Maslach, and other researchers, have characterized burnout as the development of job-related negative attitudes resulting from an inability to deal with the continual emotional stress found in the human services professions. Several researchers have focused their studies exclusively on the altruistic and people-oriented human services population. These researchers contend that the nature of the human services professions makes this population the most susceptible to burnout.

BURNOUT DEFINED

Burnout is reported to develop as a pattern of emotional overload which may take the form of cramming for a college exam (Freudenberger, 1980), idealism (Flint, 1982), impatience (Maslach, 1982), or an over-investment in activities (Welch, 1982). Burnout is most often characterized as job-related emotional exhaustion, with feelings of depersonalization, and a general attitude that personal accomplishments are no longer worth the effort. Maslach and Jackson (1981) characterize burnout with three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, a shift in feelings from positive to negative; depersonalization, a

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decrease in participation in activities; and personal accomplishments, a feeling that achievements are less worthwhile. Almost all researchers suggest that burnout develops in the altruistic individual who strives to achieve unrealistic and idealistic goals in activities of high stress and low satisfaction.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Freudenberger (1980), Pines (1981), and Farber (1983) conclude that college seniors preparing for the human services professions have been overlooked in the study of burnout. They suggest that this population may show early signs of the burnout syndrome and may offer the earliest opportunity for intervention and prevention of the development of burnout. In support of their contentions, the burnout literature indicates that college is a high-stress and very emotional environment, yet no studies have been conducted to assess burnout in the college student population.

The college senior who reports feelings of disenchantment, exhaustion from the continuing frustrations of working within the school system, and fatigue from the continuous pressure to perform, may be experiencing burnout. The student preparing for a human services career, who began college with an altruistic dedication to the field, may be experiencing burnout similar to that found in the human services professional.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of my study was to use the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) to measure burnout in college seniors who are preparing for the human services professions. This study replicates and extends the MBI to the college senior population.

THE SAMPLE

The sample for this study was drawn from the 245 college seniors, 165 seniors majoring in human services and 80 college seniors majoring in engineering. Subjects were asked to respond to a 40-item survey questionnaire. The questionnaire contained a modified-for-college-students version of the MBI; a seven-item, college-oriented burnout questionnaire; and demographic information.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE MBI

In 1976, Maslach identified three factors for burnout research: (1) depletion of one's emotional resources; (2) development of negative and cynical attitudes toward one's clients; and (3) a tendency to see one's work, and the work of others, in negative tones (Maslach, 1976). Using these three factors, the MBI was formulated with the three subscales

measuring emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment. In the development of the MBI, Maslach (1981) conceptualized burnout as a continuous variable from low to high and does not consider burnout to be dichotomous (i.e. present or absent).

SCORING OF THE MBI

The MBI is composed of three subscales with each reporting two scores measuring frequency, how often the experience occurs, and intensity, how strong the experience. For individual evaluations, six scores for all three subscales on both frequency and intensity are reported as low, medium, and high burnout.

ANALYSIS

The eight predictions of this study were analyzed using six major procedures: (1) The one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) to test for mean differences; (2) the t-test statistics for significance; (3) the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient; (4) a principal components factor analysis with varimax rotation; (5) test for difference in correlations using an r to z score transformation; and (6) chi-square statistic for proportions. The significance level of .05 was used in all analyses. Probabilities of less than or equal to .05 are reported. All tests are one-tailed, based upon reported relationships between the variables from previous research.

RESULTS

FIRST: When compared with the original studies, does any significant proportion of college seniors majoring in the human services field experience high levels of burnout as measured by the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)? As predicted, college seniors majoring in the human services fields have scores on the emotional exhaustion frequency subscale of the MBI that are not significantly different from those reported by Maslach and Jackson (1981). However, the scores on the remaining five subscales (emotional exhaustion, intensity, depersonalization frequency and intensity, personal accomplishment frequency, and intensity) are significantly lower (i.e., indicate less burnout) than those reported by Maslach and Jackson (1981). The statistical analysis of the use of the MBI with college students indicates that the MBI was less reliable for college seniors than it was for the working professional.

SECOND: Does the MBI factor analysis for college seniors have factor loadings that are similar to or essentially the same as those reported by Maslach and Jackson (1981)? Similarities were found between this study and the Maslach MBI factor analysis for the emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment subscales. The depersonalization subscale is shown to represent three factors instead of one. The factor analysis of the MBI depersonalization subscale indicates that the strength of this factor with college seniors was much weaker than that found

with the human services professional. This subscale does not work with college seniors as a unidimensional factor.

THIRD: How do the MBI subscale intercorrelations for college seniors compare with the MBI subscale intercorrelations reported by Maslach and Jackson (1981)? The magnitude of MBI subscale intercorrelations for college seniors was lower when compared with the human services professional reported by Maslach and Jackson (1981). However, the reported subscale coefficient alpha and the r to z-score transformation for correlations comparison, found that the depersonalization subscale does not hold up for college seniors and that it acts to suppress the correlations with the other two subscales.

FOURTH: Do college seniors who score high versus low on the MBI have similar high versus low scores on the self-rating of burnout according to Freudenberger (1980)? There is a definite relationship between these two measures of burnout. Students who have high burnout scores on the MBI had significantly higher mean scores on Freudenberger's burnout definition. Correlational analyses showed a moderate relationship between the two variables with a 15 percent shared variance.

FIFTH: Are the burnout scores for college seniors majoring in the human services fields significantly greater than scores for college seniors who are not majoring in the human services fields? College seniors majoring in the human services fields have mean scores and standard deviations on the MBI that are not significantly different from the college seniors who are not majoring in the human services fields. The combined influences of such items as course content, major requirements, and academic setting as represented by human services orientation, does not predict burnout.

SIXTH: Do college seniors who are majoring in the human services fields score significantly more altruistic when compared with college seniors who are not majoring in the human services fields? The burnout literature identifies the loss of altruism in the human services professional as one of the factors in the development of burnout. The college seniors majoring in the human services field were more altruistic than the college seniors who were not majoring in the human services fields.

SEVENTH: Are college seniors who major in the human services field more likely to choose working with people rather than working with things when compared with college seniors who are not majoring in the human services fields? This study finds that college seniors majoring in the human services field scored significantly higher than college seniors who are not majoring in the human services fields.

EIGHTH: Do college senior scores on the MBI indicate patterns of burnout consistent with a school-oriented burnout

questionnaire? College seniors' scores on the MBI are consistent with school-related burnout patterns, except in the case of participation with others.

PRINCIPLE FINDINGS

1. Burnout is a valid construct for college student, actually exists and relates to real world attitudes.

2. Burnout in the college senior population exists to a lesser degree than it does in the working professional.

3. Human services college seniors experience burnout similar to the human services professional on the emotional exhaustion and personal accomplishment subscales of the MBI.

4. The MBI depersonalization subscale is not a factor for college seniors.

5. Burnout occurs equally in both college seniors who major in the human services fields and college seniors who are not majoring in the human services fields.

6. College seniors who are majoring in the human services field are more altruistic and people-orineted than college seniors who are not majoring in the human services fields.

7. High burnout in college seniors predicts negative attitudes toward school, perception of less value in accomplishments, and less dedication toward school. High burnout does not predict lower levels of participation with others in school.

CONCLUSION

This study of college seniors is an expansion of the burnout research population and further work remains to be done in order to improve, define, and establish this research area. This was the first application of the modified form of the MBI for college seniors and further studies of this modification need to be completed before generalizations can be made to a larger population. The failure of the depersonalization subscale restricts the direct conceptualization of these findings for college seniors to the human services populations.